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REPORT ON THE U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION DELEGATION VISIT TO HUNGARY, YUGOSLAVIA, AND ALBANIA (CODEL DeCONCINI)

March 22-28, 1991

Prepared by the Staff of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe -- also known as the Helsinki or CSCE Commission -- was created in 1976 by Public Law 94-304 with a mandate to monitor and encourage compliance with the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was signed in Helsinki, Finland, on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada.

The Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE documents encompass nearly every aspect of relations between States, including: military-security; economic, scientific and environmental cooperation; cultural and educational exchanges; and human rights and other humanitarian concerns. The goal has been to lower the barriers which have artificially divided Europe into East and West for more than four decades. Periodic review meetings have been held to continue this process: Belgrade (1977-78), Madrid (1980-83), and Vienna (1986-89), with the next scheduled for Helsinki in March 1992. Expert meetings on specific issues and lasting only a few weeks are held between these main meetings.

The Commission consists of nine members of the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members of the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chairman and Co-Chairman are shared by the House and the Senate and rotate every 2 years, when a new Congress convenes. The Commission is currently chaired by Representative Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) and co-chaired by Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ). A professional staff of approximately 15 persons assists the Commissioners in their work.

The Commission carries out its mandate in a variety of ways. First, it gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public. It frequently holds public hearings with expert witnesses focusing on these topics. Similarly, the Commission issues reports on the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE documents. The Commission plays a unique role in assisting in the planning and execution of U.S. policy at CSCE meetings, including through participation as full members of the U.S. delegations to these meetings.

Finally, members of the Commission maintain regular contacts with parliamentarians, government officials and private individuals from other Helsinki-signatory States. Such contacts often take the form of Commission delegations, usually with the participation of other Members of Congress, to other countries, such as the visit to Hungary, Yugoslavia and Albania in March 1991.

VISIT TO HUNGARY
March 23-24, 1991

I. OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the Commission's visit to Budapest was to participate in the Seminar on Parliamentary Responsibility for Economic Development being co-sponsored by the Helsinki Commission, the Hungarian Parliament, the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity, and the Library of Congress. Additionally, members of the delegation discussed Hungary's current political and economic situation with members of the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), leaders of the Gypsy community, and U.S. business representatives.

II. CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Having completed the final round of local elections last fall, Hungary has now undergone democratic elections at every level of government. The dominant party in Parliament, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), heads the governing coalition, with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) forming the primary party of the opposition. FIDESZ, widely recognized for its dynamism and youth, holds 5.4 percent of the seats.

Political changes in Hungary have been significant since the revolution of 1989. The Parliament has begun to function like a real legislative body, engaging in spirited debates and passing laws, amendments, and parliamentary resolutions; in fact, Hungarians have been dismayed to see how noisy and undisciplined these parliamentary debates -- now shown on television for the first time -- can be. Hungary has taken the lead in distancing itself from the Warsaw Pact; the last Soviet troops are expected to have left by June 1991. Hungary was also the first former Soviet satellite to join the Council of Europe, and it has expressed a strong interest in becoming a member of the European Community within the next five years.

Human rights concerns in Hungary have focussed largely on ethnic minority rights, an issue of major concern to Hungary because of substantial Hungarian populations living in neighboring countries -- notably Romania. Within Hungary, the plight of the country's roughly 700,000 Gypsies raises questions that need to be further addressed. Anti-Semitism has also been an issue, though the government has consistently condemned anti-Semitic activities and has taken measures to protect and affirm the status of Hungary's Jewish community.

There is full freedom of the press, and independent news publications have continued to appear. Some, including the influential daily *Magyar Hirlap*, have been purchased by foreign investors. Radio and television stations, however, are still state properties, and the moratorium on establishing new transmitting frequencies is still in effect.

While Hungary has made substantial progress in implementing political reform, the economic situation is less encouraging. An annual inflation rate of roughly 35 percent has reduced living standards, and there is fear of unemployment as the country moves haltingly toward privatization. In addition to a foreign debt of $21 billion (the largest per capita debt in East-Central Europe) and the loss of the former East bloc (CMEA or COMECON) trading market, Hungary's economy suffers from structural barriers that limit progress. The telecommunications system, for example, is shockingly deficient and in need of wholesale modernization. The banking system is a shambles; only 40,000 people actually have bank accounts, and checks can take weeks or even months to clear. Finally, the task of privatizing some 2,700 firms is immense, even with Hungary's head start. The State Property Agency, established in January to oversee privatization, may actually have slowed rather than accelerated the process.

III. MEETINGS
Budapest, March 23, 1991

Meeting with FIDESZ Representatives

The meeting was attended by FIDESZ Member of Parliament Gabor Fodor, and FIDESZ Member of Parliament Thomas Molnar. Fodor, who is 29, and Molnar, who is 26, are two of 22 FIDESZ parliamentarians. Their youth and enthusiasm have helped promote FIDESZ' popular image.

Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Dennis DeConcini expressed the interests and objectives of the Commission and asked the two FIDESZ representatives to comment on the current situation in Hungary as it related to the Helsinki process.

Fodor, chairman of the parliamentary human rights group in Hungary, stressed that even thinking about human rights issues is a new concept in Hungary, and that FIDESZ is trying to convey the importance of human rights concerns to the public at large. Minorities are the major focus; substantial Hungarian minorities abroad give Hungary the impetus to push for better policies at home. Fodor felt that education is one area in which improvement could be made, pointing out that even "ethnic schools" in Hungary provide only a few classes in the mother tongue. And while all schools are publicly funded, the level of assistance is determined by the level of student enrollment, putting ethnic schools at a disadvantage.

Fodor mentioned the creation of an Ombudsman in Hungarian politics as a hopeful sign; there will be one specifically tasked to minorities and another for other citizens. He also stressed that every political party has the desire to follow the Helsinki path, but that they all lack experience and understanding. In this regard, FIDESZ has endeavored to obtain information from other countries as to how to implement human rights safeguards. Fodor further noted the need to anticipate future issues, such as abortion and gay rights. On the question of anti-Semitism, Fodor admitted that there were extremist anti-Semitic groups, but suggested that they lacked real political power.

Another major concern is the issue of refugees, particularly from the Soviet Union. Fodor emphasized that this is a global problem, and that the countries of East-Central Europe simply cannot sustain the burden of the anticipated 20-30 million Soviet refugees.

Molnar, who works on the committee dealing with the new media legislation, mentioned concerns regarding freedom of the press, noting a draft press law proposed by the Ministry of Justice that includes a proposal rendering freedom of the press secondary to freedom of the individual. Senator DeConcini agreed that a free and unfettered press was an important indicator of a democratic society.

When asked about FIDESZ' political program, Fodor suggested that FIDESZ has a more "long-range" outlook than the other parties. He said the government tends to focus foreign policy on one country (either the Soviet Union or Germany); FIDESZ prefers a broader scope. Economically, FIDESZ' main objective has been to fight inflation, and also to reduce the country's national debt and combat unemployment. Fodor acknowledged that economic reform should be undertaken quickly, if painfully, because with the opening of society Hungarians have realized that their living conditions are terrible, and preventing social discontent from overtaking the spirit of liberalism and democracy will be essential.

Regarding Prime Minister Antall's recently accepted four-year economic plan (developed by Finance Minister Mihaly Kupa), Fodor said it was the first rational economic plan FIDESZ had seen and that they would support parts of it -- e.g. tax reform and privatization.

On foreign affairs, Fodor believed it was premature for Hungary to express interest in joining NATO. Nonetheless, the trend toward "common European thinking" could lead to NATO membership at some point. When asked how FIDESZ implements its foreign policy agenda -- for example, by assisting minorities abroad -- Fodor responded that bilateral agreements and direct contacts were the most important ways, and mentioned the recent high-level FIDESZ delegation to Romania. He also stressed that FIDESZ was more pragmatic and forward-looking than some other parties on these issues, citing as an

example its opposition to the proposed memorial to Trianon.[6]

On the question of FIDESZ' political organization and activities -- recruiting, mobilization, getting-out-the-vote -- Fodor conceded that the biggest hurdle was fighting apathy. He said FIDESZ was trying to bridge the gap between politicians and the public, and confided that FIDESZ MPs tend to feel a little bit like rock stars. (In a recent poll, the 29-year old Gabor Fodor was voted the third most popular politician in Hungary). FIDESZ relies mostly on its local groups, which have been established almost everywhere in Hungary, and on "Orange Clubs" (the FIDESZ symbol is orange) -- social and cultural groups that form part of their network. He also mentioned open discussions and meetings with voters, similar to town meetings.

Meeting with Leaders of the Gypsy Community

The meeting was attended by Aladar Horvath, Member of Parliament; Bela Ostojkan, Deputy Director of the Phralipe Independent Gypsy Organization; and Jeno Zsigo, Spokesman for Phralipe.

Co-Chairman DeConcini opened by expressing the Commission's desire to speak with government officials and others about the specific problems facing the Gypsy community in Hungary, mentioning in particular his interest in seeing how political changes in Hungary have been reflected in the rights of the individual. He then asked Horvath to describe the situation of Gypsies under the new regime and within the new democratic process.

Horvath responded that, in sum, the situation was not as good as it could be, and that the Gypsy community had initially held higher expectations. It was difficult for Gypsies to run in the parliamentary elections; the only two Gypsy MPs were elected on the SZDSZ ticket, as a gesture of thanks for Phralipe's support for SZDSZ. And while it is true that the laws provide for minorities, including Gypsies, the proposed budget does not include the financing to implement the changes the minorities' law would require.

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[6] The Treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920, transferred about two-thirds of Hungary's territory to neighboring countries.

When asked about the future, Ostojkan responded that he was hopeful, but that the Gypsies, frankly, were in a worse situation now than before. Discrimination in terms of home loans, unemployment benefits, and so forth was wearing them down. More representation would help, as would more financing and more emphasis on national minority institutions; nonetheless, when, before the elections, Phralipe had sent its program to the various political parties, only SZDSZ had bothered to respond. Ostojkan concluded his statement more pessimistically than he had begun, pronouncing the situation catastrophic and suggesting that things had gone from bad to worse. DeConcini pointed out that under the old regime, a person could be arrested for his or her political views. Ostojkan responded that in the new Hungary, a person can say anything but no one listens.

Ostojkan also mentioned that the Hungarian Minister for Minorities had recently announced that the situation of Gypsies was worse in Western Europe than in Hungary. Ostojkan felt that the veiled message here was that the government was not responsible for further action -- such as positive discrimination, affirmative action in education, social programs, unemployment benefits, and the like.

Zsigo described the double burden the Gypsies bear. The first element is the myth projected on the Gypsy minority -- that they are unteachable, alien, undeserving. The second element is the unwritten law of discrimination they face in all areas of life. Eighty percent of Gypsies are unskilled manual laborers. Between 50-60 percent of Gypsy children have not finished primary school by age 15. And the percentage of Gypsy children in Hungary's state institutions is a disproportionate 36 percent (Gypsies form 5 percent of the population). Gypsy parents are perceived as unfit to care for their young, giving the state impetus to take the children away and institutionalize them.

All the delegation members were concerned by this issue; Co-Chairman DeConcini later noted that it reminded him of discrimination the Native American community has faced in the United States. When asked about the government's justification for taking the children away; Zsigo replied somewhat vaguely that it could be anything, but that it reflected a profound misunderstanding and mistrust of the Gypsy community's way of life.

Concerning the economic plight of the Gypsies, it seemed ironic that they had more job security in the old system because they were necessary for manual labor. Now they are first in line for the unemployment that privatization and restructuring will bring. Already, 70 percent of the Gypsy community is unemployed or stands to be within the year. And Zsigo doesn't think the government will "spend a penny" on Gypsies in the coming year.

Phralipe is currently preparing a study outlining specific concerns of the Hungarian Gypsy community, which they plan to forward to the CSCE as soon as possible.

Visit to the Grave of Imre Nagy

The delegation laid a wreath at the grave of Imre Nagy, Hungary's Prime Minister at the time of the 1956 uprising.

The short-lived government of Imre Nagy took the first steps toward a free and independent Hungary, with a multi-party system based on popular sovereignty. The arrival of Soviet troops on November 4, 1956, crushed the uprising and led to the deaths of thousands of Hungarian citizens. Nagy and his close associates were taken into Soviet custody, tried, and executed. He was buried in an unmarked grave until June 16, 1989, when an historic public reburial occurred -- attended by exiled former leaders of the uprising and hundreds of American citizens who were freedom fighters, as well as past, present, and future political officials. The resurrection of Nagy's legacy and ideals marked what one speaker called "the border between two great epochs" and helped speed the dramatic changes that occurred in Hungary at the close of 1989.

Meeting with U.S. Business Representatives

Members of the Commission delegation also met with representatives of U.S. business firms based in Budapest to assess the climate for foreign trade and investment in Hungary and the region. The business representatives briefly described their individual experiences in setting up operations. They made particular note of the need to improve the communication and banking systems. For the most part, they expressed satisfaction with Hungarian economic reforms designed to attract foreign investment. The participants included the chairman of the recently established American Chamber of Commerce in Hungary. Department of Commerce Commissioner William D. Fritts, Jr. described several new initiatives designed to assist U.S. businesses interested in investing in Central and Eastern Europe.

IV. BUDAPEST SEMINAR ON PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Parliamentarians from the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe gathered in Budapest, March 22-24, at the Seminar on Parliamentary Responsibility for Economic Development. The event, the first of its kind, was cosponsored by the Helsinki Commission, the Hungarian Parliament, the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity, and the Library of Congress.

The seminar brought together experts on a wide-range of monetary and structural issues related to economic development. Among the topics discussed were: "Democratization and Market Economies"; "Economic Programs for Transition to a Market Economy and the Legislative Agenda"; "The Bretton Woods Process and the Prioritization of Economic and Development Issues"; Trade and Investn.ent", and "Privatization - A Key Process in the Establishment of a Free Market".

Co-Chairman DeConcini delivered an address on the Helsinki process and the role of CSCE in economies in transition. DeConcini observed that, "the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are faced with the challenge of not only rebuilding but also reforming their shattered economies. At this critical junction", he noted, "lawmakers have an invaluable advantage which history doesn't permit very often -- the freshness and the momentum of a new beginning."

Recounting the work at the 1990 CSCE Bonn Conference on Economic Cooperation, the Co-Chairman said, "the CSCE process has a valuable role to play in providing guidelines and supporting the difficult transition to pluralism, markets and integration." He insisted that, "the creation of a favorable climate for investment must be the highest priority for the newly emerging democracies. And to create such a climate, the pace and content of legislation adopted by the national parliaments will be critical."

Former Senator Charles McC. Mathias, Vice Chairman of the International Foundation, drawing on his extensive legislative experience in the United States Senate, stressed the difficulties parliamentarians face when attempting to set priorities. Dr. Paul Volker, former Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, discussed the role of central banks in monetary stabilization and fiscal policy.

Several scholars also participated in the seminar. Dr. Marvin Jackson, a professor at the Leuven Institute for European Studies, was critical of governments which seek to squelch the entrepreneurial spirit among their people.

Reception at the Residence of
U.S. Ambassador Charles H. Thomas

On the evening of Saturday, March 23, the Commission hosted a reception at the residence of U.S. Ambassador Charles H. Thomas. The reception was attended by parliamentarians and others associated with the Economic Development Seminar, U.S. business representatives in Hungary, the various officials and individuals the delegation had met with earlier in the day, and friends of the Commission.

VISIT TO YUGOSLAVIA
March 24-27, 1991

I. OBJECTIVES

The Commission delegation travelled to Yugoslavia to meet with federal officials and officials representing three key republics: Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina. The Commission also wanted to meet with opposition groups and private citizens in these three republics in order to hear their views. In addition to observing the situation in Yugoslavia firsthand, the main goals of the visit were: (1) to express concern about recent developments in Yugoslavia, especially threats of resorting to the use of force or of military intervention to maintain the country's unity; (2) to encourage federal and republic political leaders alike to engage in a genuine and constructive dialogue with the goal of achieving a democratic and peaceful solution to Yugoslavia's current crisis; and (3) to express continuing concern regarding human rights abuses in Yugoslavia, in particular in Kosovo province, where the situation had worsened since the Commission's visit one year before.

Overall, the delegation was able to accomplish these objectives. Its members also gained a better understanding of the complex problems plaguing Yugoslavia today. Given these complexities and the enormous polarization of views among the republics and within the federal government, it is difficult to assess in concrete terms the extent to which the delegation's visit had an impact on developments in Yugoslavia. It did, however, make clear that, whatever the Yugoslavs decide for the future of their country, the international response to their decisions will be based on the extent to which Helsinki principles are upheld by the result.

II. THE CONTEXT

Among the Central and East European states which became communist after World War II, Yugoslavia was the first in which major political and economic reform was attempted. Following their break from the Soviet bloc in 1948, Yugoslav communists under Josip Broz Tito placed the country on its own path of communist development.

The greater sense of legitimacy with which the reform-minded and independent communists of Yugoslavia ruled, however, made their monopoly on political power less vulnerable to popular pressures for change than those of the neighboring East European communists who clearly owed their power to strict controls and Soviet support. Thus, movement toward a pluralistic political system was more gradual, with some of Yugoslavia's republics going more quickly than others. Slovenia, for example, was moving toward such

a system for a number of years, with reform-minded Communist officials leading the way. On the opposite end, Serbia continued to maintain a fairly centralized, communist political system that was less tolerant of dissenting views. The others were in between, with Croatia leaning guardedly toward Slovenia, followed by Bosnia-Hercegovina and Macedonia, and then Montenegro, which traditionally has kept close ties with Serbia.

Fueling this complex situation has been a threat, becoming increasingly real, to the continued existence of Yugoslavia as a single political entity. Unlike most other East-Central European states, which are essentially defined by one national group despite sizable minorities, Yugoslavia represents a collection of many national and ethnic groups who joined together only after World War I. Divided for centuries by the Austro-Hungarian or the Ottoman Empires, the Yugoslav peoples have enormously different histories, religious affiliations and cultures. Following Tito's death 11 years ago, when political power was divided among the six republics and two provinces in such a way that none of them would be able to dominate the others in the Yugoslav federation, repressed historical mistrust crept back to the fore. Disputes regarding the country's future grew among the republics and provinces, with a parallel resurgence in nationalism, ethnic strife and separatist sentiment.

Yugoslavia's poor economic performance -- marked in the 1980's by severe hyperinflation, a large foreign debt, unemployment, and declining living standards -- exacerbated these differences. Not surprisingly, the economic situation varies considerably among the republics and provinces. In late 1989, Ante Markovic, President of the Federal Executive Council (Prime Minister), announced new economic measures designed to reverse the country's worsening economic situation. Brought into force in 1990, these measures included: making the Yugoslav currency convertible at a rate of 7 dinars to 1 deutsche mark, freezing wages and fuel and transport prices, creating capital markets in Belgrade and Ljubljana, and taking other steps to marketize further the Yugoslav economy. The measures at first had a positive effect, particularly in bringing the inflation rate down, but, for various reasons, there has been opposition by the republics, which has undermined the effectiveness of the reform program.

Kosovo

The crisis in Kosovo, one of two autonomous provinces within the Serbian republic, was among the first visible cracks in the federal system and likely encouraged subsequent divisions throughout the country. Kosovo is the poorest region of the country despite massive government investment. Serbs live there; it was the center of their medieval kingdom and the cradle of their culture. Ethnic Albanians, however, have lived there for centuries as well and made up a majority of the population for decades. Their proportion has increased to about 90 percent as a result of the Albanian birth rate, the highest in Europe, and Serbian outmigration, claimed to be caused by Albanian harassment but certainly due also to poor economic conditions.

Along with Vojvodina, the other province in Serbia, Kosovo was given considerable autonomy as a result of the 1974 Constitution. When increased educational and cultural opportunities for ethnic Albanians combined with few employment or other economic opportunities, however, reviving Albanian pride turned into increasingly nationalistic protest in the 1980's as large numbers of Albanians demanded that Kosovo be separated from Serbia and upgraded to a full republic, with smaller groups calling for separation from Yugoslavia altogether. Demonstrations and violence caused a major crackdown in 1981, with further arrests throughout the remainder of the decade. By the end of the 1980's, a resurgence in Serbian nationalism caused the republic, led by its charismatic President, Slobodan Milosevic, to assert greater control over the affairs of its two provinces by amending the Serbian Constitution. Ensuing unrest led to further violence and a state of emergency in 1989 and 1990. The autonomy of the province has been taken away, and tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians have been removed from their jobs. Protesting the removal of autonomy, in July 1990 the Kosovo Assembly declared the province a separate entity within Yugoslavia (in essence, a republic), but this action was declared illegal and the Assembly was disbanded.

Since that time, the situation has remained tense, with Albanian opposition leaders seeking to prevent the population from taking any action that could be used by Serbian authorities as a pretext for another violent crackdown. At the same time, they now seem to believe that Serbian actions have precluded any possible solution to the crisis that would still keep Kosovo as a part of the Serbian republic. For this reason, the leading opposition organization, the Democratic Alliance of Kosovo, refused to participate in the multi-party elections in December 1990 and was generally successful in getting the Albanian population to boycott the elections entirely, despite the prospect of getting most if not all of the 34 Kosovo seats in the Serbian Assembly.

Republic Elections in Late 1990

In Slovenia and Croatia -- the two most liberal republics politically and the most prosperous economically -- the ruling communist parties (Leagues of Communists) were the first to revoke their guaranteed monopoly on power and schedule multi-party elections, which were held in April of 1990. In both cases the Leagues of Communists, despite undertaking major reform of their party program, were removed from power by the voters and replaced by the DEMOS coalition of opposition parties in Slovenia and by the Croatian Democratic Union, both of which are to the right on the political spectrum and lean toward turning the current confederation into, at most, a very loose confederation of sovereign Yugoslav republics.

In November and December 1990, the remaining four Yugoslav republics -- Macedonia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Serbia and Montenegro -- held their first elections since World War II in which alternative political parties were allowed to participate. Economic reform, democratic development, and environmental problems were among the topics addressed in the elections, but the future of the Yugoslav federation was by far the largest concern. The completion of the election process in all six republics set the stage for talks among them on the future of Yugoslavia as a political entity.

Macedonia

Macedonia was the first to hold the late-1990 elections, with first-round voting on November 11, a second round two weeks later, and a third round the following week in those districts where irregularities had caused a nullification of results.

Sensitivities surrounding the issue of Macedonian nationality were an important aspect of the elections. Externally, Macedonians have been generally more favorable to a federation because it recognizes their existence, while neighboring Greece and Bulgaria deny the existence of a Macedonian nation. However, the federation is favored only so long as the two northern republics of Croatia and Slovenia remain a part of it as a counterbalance to Serbia, since more nationalistic Serbs will question Macedonian national identity as well. Internally, ethnic balances were even more of an issue as Albanians, who make up at least one-quarter of the population, complained of discrimination, while Macedonians expressed fears of losing control of their republic's affairs to this and other growing minority groups.

Before any official results were known, predicted victories for the reformed communist Party of Democratic Transformation and the Albanian-led Party of Democratic Prosperity prompted a nationalist bloc of parties -- led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) and the Movement of All-Macedonian Action (MAAK) -- to organize demonstrations and call for the nullification of the entire election results. They also announced their intention to form their own government. IMRO, however, distanced itself from this position just before a second round gave it a total of 37 of the 120 seats in the unicameral assembly, more than any other party. The League of Communists-Party of Democratic Transformation came in a close second with 31 seats, followed by the Party of Democratic Prosperity with 25 seats, and the Alliance of Reform Forces (Macedonia) -- the republic affiliate of the new party emphasizing economic reform created earlier in the year by Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic -- with 19 seats in a coalition with a few smaller parties. Other parties and independent candidates took the remaining seats. Despite the early calls for nullification of the election results, the election process appeared generally free and fair, although there were considerable problems at many polling stations regarding the voters' lists, voting in secrecy and protection of the ballot box.

Bosnia-Hercegovina

The elections in Bosnia-Hercegovina took place on November 18 for a 240-seat bicameral assembly. A second round was held two weeks later for those seats in the Chamber of Municipalities which had not obtained the required majority of votes cast in the first round.

Concern over balancing the republic's three main nationalities, none of which constitute a majority of the population, complicated the election process. The election law itself reflected this, apportioning by nationality the seats of the collective presidency (two ethnic Muslims, two Serbs, two Croats, and one from any of the republic's other peoples or nationalities), and requiring the assembly election results to reflect ethnically, within 15 percentage points, the population as a whole. All candidates on the ballot were therefore listed by ethnic identity in addition to party affiliation. The Serbian Democratic Party threatened to form a "National Council" to protect Serbian interests if it did not fare well in the elections, and Muslim-Serb confrontations were reported in some places. The nationality parties seemed united, however, in their lack of trust in the republics's communist leaders. Originally having to struggle to have nationality-based parties even permitted in the republic, these parties threatened a boycott of the elections until the authorities agreed to permit election observers from the parties to inspect ballot boxes and monitor the actual counting of ballots at polling stations.

The three nationality parties won easily, reflecting the increased national identity and anti-communist sentiment of the republic. For the 130-seat Chamber of Citizens, the Party of Democratic Action (PDA), the leading Muslim party, won 41 seats, followed by the Serbian Democratic Party with 34 seats and the Croatian Democratic Community with 20 seats. In contrast, the League of Communists won only 18 seats, five of which were in coalition with another party, and the republic branch of Markovic's Alliance of Reformed Forces won only 12, one of which was in coalition with another party. Remaining seats went to smaller parties. For the 110-seat Chamber of Municipalities, the three nationality parties won all but four seats: the PDA winning 45 seats, and the Serbian and Croatian parties winning 36 and 25 seats, respectively. They swept all seven seats of the presidency, including the one reserved for other nationalities, which was won by an ethnic "Yugoslav" PDA member. Alija Izetbegovic, head of the PDA, won a "Muslim" seat and was selected by other members of the presidency to be its president. The coalition decided that a Serbian party member, Momcilo Krajisnik, would head the assembly, and a Croatian party member, Jure Pelivan, would, as premier, form a government.

As with Macedonia, there were considerable problems at a number of polling stations throughout the republic, including one where a ballot box was set on fire by an irate voter. Nevertheless, the results were considered legitimate, and the campaigning by the various parties in Bosnia-Hercegovina was probably the most active of any of the republics, with descriptions of party programs and posters of candidates found in abundance.

Serbia

The first round of the elections in Serbia were held on December 9. The election was essentially a contest between the ruling communist party, renamed the Socialist Party, led by republic President Slobodan Milosevic, and the Serbian Renewal Movement led by Vuk Draskovic. Both took highly nationalistic positions, differing primarily in their ideological outlook, with the Socialists maintaining fairly traditional communist views.

Opposition parties in Serbia had, as in Bosnia-Hercegovina, threatened a boycott until the authorities agreed that the main parties could be represented on the republic election commission and other electoral bodies. Opposition parties also complained about very limited access to and obvious bias in the media, which favored the ruling Socialists. While the Socialists received extensive coverage, the multitude of other parties were left to split the limited time allocated for political statements on television equally among themselves. Threats were made against opposition leaders, most notably Vuk Draskovic, and one Serbian Renewal Movement worker was killed by a Socialist Party member on December 6. Also tarnishing the elections was a boycott by the Albanian opposition in Kosovo province on grounds that participation would mean acknowledgement of Kosovo as a part of Serbia, and only a very few of the Albanians who make up an overwhelming majority of Kosovo's population went to the polls.

The results represented a big win for the Socialist Party, which, after a second round on December 23, won 194 out of 250 seats in the unicameral republic assembly, compared to 19 for the Serbian Renewal Movement and eight for the Hungarian party in Vojvodina province. Moreover, Milosevic took a first-round victory in a presidential race involving 32 candidates, obtaining two-thirds of the vote compared to second-place Vuk Draskovic's one-sixth of the vote. Opposition parties, forming a second-round coalition, were strongest in Vojvodina, where they won 20 of 56 seats, while the Albanian boycott allowed the Socialist Party to win 30 of the 34 seats in Kosovo. The Socialist win clearly reflected the limits placed on the opposition during the campaign and election irregularities. It also reflected some belief in Milosevic's promises and ability to defend Serbian interests within the federation, which he pledged to fight to maintain, and to maintain the economic security of the Serbian worker.

Montenegro

Montenegro, the smallest and poorest of the six Yugoslav republics, held its first multi-party elections on December 9, the same day as the Serbian elections. A new Communist leadership, less than one year in power, had genuine popular support, although opposition parties did complain of media bias and restraints on campaigning. The head of the republic's League of Communists, Momir Bulatovic, won the republic Presidency with more than three-quarters of the vote, and his party won 83 of the 125 seats in the unicameral assembly. The Communist victory can be credited to its moderate position on the historical question of Montenegro's relationship with Serbia, with which it has a close ethnic affinity. The Serbian nationalist party in Montenegro favored even closer ties with Serbia than the Communists, while the Alliance of Reform Forces, the political party of Yugoslav Prime Minister Markovic, which came in second with 17 seats in the assembly, favored restoration of Montenegro's independent identity and Western orientation.

Events in 1991

Despite the varying degrees to which they were free and fair, the fact that each of the republics held multi-party elections by the end of 1990 provided a basic mandate for the republic leaders to begin serious discussions in 1991 on the constitutional and other changes necessary to satisfy all of the republics and the peoples of Yugoslavia as a whole.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1990 it appeared as if the country would likely not stay together and would, in fact, descend into a civil war. On December 23, for example, Slovenia held a plebiscite in which voters were asked whether Slovenia should become a sovereign and independent state. Over 88 percent of the votes cast answered "yes." Meanwhile, a group of senior military and old-guard political officials formed a new League of Communists--Movement for Yugoslavia, which was seen as potentially intervening in the political crisis to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia by use of force.

In 1991, however, discussions on the future political framework of Yugoslavia began, first in Belgrade on January 10, among the republic and provincial presidents, the collective Presidency of Yugoslavia and Prime Minister Markovic. The sole accomplishment of the first talks was to agree to meet again, together and bilaterally in between, but such agreement alone was sufficient to generate a greater optimism that a solution could be found to Yugoslavia's crisis that would avert further unrest and civil war.

Unfortunately, while these talks continued through February and March, a series of events worked to keep a satisfactory solution out of reach. First, in early January, just before the first summit meeting, it was revealed that the Serbian Government, via behind-the-scenes printing of dinars, had issued the equivalent of $1.4 billion in order to pay pensions, provide agricultural subsidies and assist failing economic enterprises. The scandal was criticized by the federal government as endangering reform efforts and condemned by officials from the other republics, many of whom claimed that this sealed the fate of Yugoslavia as a centralized political entity.

Later in January, the Yugoslav military threatened to intervene in Croatia after the republic's government refused to obey a decree of the Yugoslav Presidency ordering all "illegal paramilitary units" to disarm. As the deadline ran out, agreement seemed to have been reached that no action would be taken against the recalcitrant republic, but Yugoslav military forces in Croatia went on a state of alert, as did the republic's units. A tense standoff was soon relieved by an emergency meeting of the Yugoslav Presidency, during which Yugoslavia's Defense Minister agreed to call off the state of alert. In turn, Croatian President Tudjman agreed not to call up paramilitary reservists and to remove extreme nationalists from the government. Tudjman did not agree, however, to disband the paramilitary units, nor subsequently to turn his Defense Minister, Martin Spegelj, over to Yugoslav Army officials after he was filmed buying weapons from Hungarian sources and reportedly planning for civil war in Croatia.

During February, talks continued, occasionally with one or more republic leaders boycotting or walking out of a meeting, but other developments continued to raise the possibilities of open conflict. In early March, for example, Serbian inhabitants of Pakrac, a town in eastern Croatia, took control of the local police station, prompting a clash between the Serbs and Croatian police units and, eventually, the intervention of Yugoslav military units. Croatian officials accused the Serbian Government of instigating the incident. Two weeks later, in fact, a Serbian populated region of Croatia called Kninska Krajina, which had already proclaimed its autonomy, was declared a "Serbian autonomous region" by the Serbian authorities in Belgrade.

Also in mid-March, Serbia announced that it no longer recognized federal authority in Yugoslavia as Borisav Jovic -- Serbia's representative on the collective Presidency, who was also serving a one-year term as President of the Presidency -- resigned. The move came just after a decision to declare a state of emergency failed in the Presidency. The representatives of Montenegro and Vojvodina, who had supported Serbia, resigned as well, and the Kosovo representative, Riza Sapunxhia, was dismissed by a vote of the Serbian Assembly for voting against Serbia. The removal of four out of the eight members of the collective Presidency created a political void which was viewed as a ploy to prompt the military to step in. The remaining members of the Presidency, however, rallied around the federal body and rejected Sapunxhia's removal. The military failed to intervene, and the Serbian Assembly, deciding that the effort had not produced the desired result, therefore rejected the Jovic resignation. The President subsequently resumed his work.

As the crisis in the federation was developing, the situation within Serbia itself had grown increasingly unstable. Concerned less with the nationalist cause and more with growing economic woes and state control of the media, tens of thousands took to the streets of Belgrade on March 9 to demand the resignation of senior Serbian leaders, including the Interior Minister and five state television editors. After breaking through a police cordon, the crowd was attacked by military units deploying tanks and water cannon. Dozens were wounded, and a police officer and a protester were killed. After several hours of talks with the authorities, several opposition leaders, including Vuk Draskovic, were placed under arrest. When the crowds returned to the street in the following days and protests spread to other cities in the republic, the Serbian Government eventually acquiesced to their demands, released the opposition leaders and replaced the media officials. The Serbian Interior Minister, Radmilo Bogdanovic, was also eventually replaced.

It was in the immediate aftermath of these recurring confrontations that has been part of the broader crisis in Yugoslavia that CODEL DeConcini visited Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo.

III. THE VISIT

During the three-day visit to Yugoslavia, the Commission delegation first travelled to Belgrade for meetings with both federal and Serbian officials, as well as with opposition leaders within the Serbian republic. On the federal level, the delegation first met with Miran Mejak, a Slovene who serves as President of the Chamber of Republics and Provinces of the Yugoslav Federal Assembly. Meetings were then held with the President of the Presidency, Borisav Jovic, and with the President of the Federal Executive Council (Prime Minister), Ante Markovic. On the republic level, the Commission met with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who was accompanied by several of his advisers.

Regarding opposition groups in Serbia, the delegation met with Dr. Dragoljub Micunovic, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Serbia, and a luncheon was held for representatives of several opposition groups and parties. The delegation then divided, with some members visiting the Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and others meeting with representatives of the Albanian opposition in Kosovo.

Travelling next to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, the Commission delegation had meetings with the President of that republic, Franjo Tudjman, with Croatia's representative on the Yugoslav collective Presidency who was then serving as that body's Vice President, Stipe Mesic, and with senior governmental officials, including Premier Josip Manolic, Foreign Minister Frame Vinko Golem and several Croatian Assembly delegates. In order to hear the diversity of views which exist in the republic, the delegation also met with Marko Veselica, President of the Democratic Party of Croatia, Zdravko Tomacz, a representative of the Party of Democratic Changes (formerly the League of Communists of Croatia), and a group of Croatian journalists. Some members of the delegation broke away from the main group and travelled to Jasenovac, the site of a notorious prison camp

during World War II, when Croatia was ruled as an independent, fascist state. The visit concluded with a meeting with a group representing the various organizations of the Serbian community in Croatia.

In Sarajevo, the final stop in Yugoslavia, the Commission delegation met with the Premier of the Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Jure Pelivan, the President of the Assembly, Momcilo Krajisnik, and the collective Presidency of the republic, preceded by a brief meeting with the President of that body, Alija Izetbegovic. The delegation also met with Jakub Selimoski, Reis-Ul-Ulema, Head of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia, and with various citizens protesting against government actions viewed as violating press freedoms.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

Considerable hospitality was extended to the Commission delegation during the entire course of its stay. Despite Yugoslav preoccupation with internal matters and some criticism of the approach of the U.S. Congress to developments in Yugoslavia, the delegation found that officials at all levels and private citizens were interested in the delegation's concerns and willing to answer the questions and criticisms raised by the delegation.

In meetings with federal officials, considerable frustration with the existing situation in Yugoslavia was expressed, but the specific complaints varied among them. Overall, there seemed to be a definite weakening of federal bodies. Outside the governmental structure, there no longer was any countrywide League of Communists of Yugoslavia to enforce unity, and no alternative pan-Yugoslav party or group had much support. The Federal Government was weakened by the inability of Prime Minister Markovic to implement effective economic reforms, as well as by the poor showing of his political party, the Alliance of Reform Forces, in republic elections in late 1990. The resignation or dismissal of one-half of the Yugoslav Presidency, which collectively is the country's head of state, was seen as undermining the credibility of that institution, even if some of the resignations had been rejected. The only federal institution left, the military, lurked in the background but did not seem prepared to become actively involved in the country's political problems, especially in light of clear opposition to any such move by the republics, most federal officials and foreign governments. In short, effective political power in Yugoslavia had clearly devolved to the constituent republics.

Miran Mejak of the Federal Assembly expressed some hope that the Yugoslav republics would find some agreement that would keep them together but added that, realistically, the chances of this seemed slight. On the role of the Federal Assembly in helping to resolve the current crisis, he expressed doubts as to the ability of the body to increase its involvement, other than perhaps in helping Prime Minister Markovic with some economic reform measures, without the agreement of the republics. He said that elections for the Federal Assembly would be difficult, as Slovenia and some other republics

would oppose continuation of a Chamber of the Federation with representation based on population and not on equality for each of the republics.

Borisav Jovic, President of the Presidency, described three key problems preoccupying the Presidency. One was the refusal of Slovene military draftees to serve in the Yugoslav Army. The second was the decision of the Slovenian Government to remove control of the territorial defence units in the republic from the central control of the Yugoslav military. The third was the existence of the Croatian paramilitary forces armed by what he considered to be the illegal importation of weapons from Hungary. In short, he accused these two republics of seeking secession from Yugoslavia under the guise of "disassociation" and of blocking attempts to find an agreement acceptable to all sides. He noted, in particular, the difficulties faced by Serbs in Yugoslavia, who live in great numbers outside the Republic of Serbia itself. Noting the possibilities for falling into civil war, President Jovic nevertheless expressed the commitment of the collective Presidency to finding a peaceful and democratic solution to the country's problems. He denied that the Presidency had discussed the use of military force to bring stability to the situation, or that his attempted resignation had in any way weakened the influence of the body.

The delegation met with Stipe Mesic, the Vice-President of the Presidency, while in Zagreb. Mesic said that the ability of the Presidency to function effectively was hampered not so much by the recent resignations but, more generally, by Serbia's control of at least three solid votes in the body and the current position of its representative as President of the Presidency. He said that the current federal structure, based on an old communist system, had broken down and that a new, workable structure had to include a recognition of the sovereignty of the republics and their right to defend themselves.

Prime Minister Ante Markovic was perhaps the most pessimistic, at least for Yugoslavia's short-term prospects. His focus was primarily on the economic situation. He noted that, when the Commission had visited Yugoslavia one year earlier, there was great optimism that his newly instituted reforms would succeed in bringing about an economic recovery, especially since they had lowered the inflation rate significantly. He said that opposition from the republics, each with their own reasons, had made additional reforms impossible to implement. He explained that, as a result, Yugoslavia would be unable to pay its debts and asked the delegation to encourage the United States and other Western countries to be more amenable to debt rescheduling under the auspices of the Paris Club. He admitted that Yugoslavia had its problems but that it would be a mistake to categorize it with other Balkan countries in terms of human rights performance. He reaffirmed his own commitment to a democratic Yugoslavia but stressed that economic sanctions against Yugoslavia in light of human rights problems would be counterproductive.

The future of Yugoslavia as a whole continued to be the major topic of concern in meetings with senior officials from the republics. Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia, expressed his view that the country's future political framework should be decided peacefully, openly and democratically. He added, however, that the Serbian people want to remain in one country and not in separate countries. It was not possible, he claimed, for three million Serbs to live as "national minorities" outside of Serbia in a confederation, as opposed to a full "nationality" within a federal Yugoslavia, and said he had an obligation to represent the interests of Serbs throughout the country. When asked, as a theoretical point, whether the same right to live together in one state applied to Albanians, Milosevic characterized the Albanians in Kosovo as a true "minority" that lived on land historically belonging to Serbia. As a result, the most they could be given was equality with other republics in regard to their rights. He accused the Croatian Government of threatening the Serbs in that republic with use of force.

Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, not unexpectedly, took a different view. After a lengthy overview of Croatian history, in which he stressed Croatian opposition to fascism as well as to communism, President Tudjman explained the twin-threat faced by the republic -- the restoration of communism in Croatia and the denial of the republic's sovereignty. He described President Milosevic's position on maintaining the Serbian people in one state as untenable, and accused Serbian and federal communist forces of instigating unrest among Croatia's Serbian community as a pretext for military intervention. Tudjman provided few details of the bilateral meeting he had with Serbian President Milosevic the day before (after the Commission had met with Milosevic) but said that Milosevic seemed more open than before to resolving differences peacefully. He also said that the importation of weapons by Croatia was within the right of all republics to arm and defend themselves, and he said that the Yugoslav Presidency's attempt to disarm Croatia was politically, and not legally, motivated.

The President of the Presidency of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Alija Izetbegovic, expressed his hope of finding a compromise between the opposing views of the main contenders: Croatia and Serbia. He described a solution which would include respect for the internal and international borders of Yugoslavia and acknowledgement of the sovereignty of each of the republics in what would likely be a confederal system. He added that centralization would continue regarding economic matters but that there would be new and improved economic structures, such as a central bank and a common tax policy. Central government institutions, moreover, could be moved to cities in other republics, although Belgrade would remain as the country's capital. He saw as a key ingredient to such a solution the equal development of democratic government throughout the country and not just in some republics. While criticizing efforts to maintain political centralizing, he was also critical of efforts of republics to secede, which, he said, would likely cause border disputes and perhaps open conflict.

In each one of the republics, internal developments were also discussed. Common among them all were enormous economic problems. In Serbia and Croatia, officials were critical of the Markovic reform program as unrealistic and damaging, while in Bosnia-Hercegovina political differences and unrest, not the policies of Prime Minister Markovic, were seen as the primary source of the economic downturn. There was general acceptance of the need to allow markets to function more freely, but the development of the private sector was most pronounced in Croatia. Worried about the effect of ethnic strife on the tourist industry, Croatian officials stressed that travel along the Croatian coast and to other tourist destinations was safer than commonly believed.

In Serbia, opposition representatives were critical of the current Serbian leadership for its undemocratic policies, including control of the media. They felt that the recent crackdown on demonstrators in Belgrade had damaged the reputation of President Milosevic significantly, and that his days in office might be "numbered." They said that, while many Serbs did not like what Milosevic's policies have meant for the Albanians in the province, he had enough support to get away with the repression that has occurred in Kosovo. The brutality in Belgrade, however, had destroyed Milosevic's credibility, since the people being attacked were Serbs themselves.

Albanian leaders from Kosovo described in detail recurring human rights abuses by the Serbian authorities. They expressed gratitude for the efforts of the Commission in the past but noted that things had, in fact, worsened in the past year as Kosovo's autonomy was taken away. In particular, they stressed the closing of *Riljinda,* the Albanian-language publishing enterprise in Kosovo, the firing of thousands of Albanians from their jobs, and continued harassment of Albanian activists. They concluded that, while the Albanians of Kosovo were willing to remain in a united Yugoslavia, they could no longer accept being part of Serbia. For this reason, they explained, they could not have participated in the December 1990 Serbian elections, a position which members of the Commission delegation thought was a tactical mistake. The Albanians nevertheless expressed a continued willingness to meet with Serbian officials to discuss their differences and resolve them peacefully. As long as the Serbian Government refuses to do so, they added, the more difficult it will be for them to keep the Albanian population in Kosovo from engaging in more active protests, which could lead to further unrest. In Sarajevo, an official added that the human rights of Albanians in Kosovo, like all individuals, are fundamental and therefore should not be made dependent on any proclamation of loyalty to Serbia.

The delegation raised these concerns with Serbian President Milosevic. He denied the existence of overt media control, maintaining that there has been no censorship in Serbia for over three years. When questioned on opposition protest to alleged controls on the press and television, as well as problems during the campaign period for the Serbian elections, he did concede that there were problems in the development of a democratic system in Serbia, which, he said, could not be created overnight. In any event, Milosevic rejected the notion that his political positions could be characterized as "Bolshevik," alleging that support for the Soviet brand of communism had been stronger

in Croatia and Slovenia than in Serbia. While he did not express any greater willingness to talk with Albanian representatives from Kosovo, he did say that preparations were being made that would allow for multi-party, provincial elections in Kosovo within two months. He added, however, that the governing of Kosovo could not occur by the "imposing of decisions" by an Albanian majority. Instead, decisions would only become effective if reached by the consensus of all ethnic groups in the province.

In Croatia, the main human rights question centered around the treatment of the Serbian community, which represents about 12 percent of the republic's population. Representatives of the Serbian community cited as the main abuses committed by the Croatian Government: the firing of ethnic Serbian officials, including judges, police officers and enterprise managers; the lack of constitutional guarantees of the rights of Serbs living in the republic; and the attempted use of force against the Serbian population. They generally denied that Serbs in Croatia had held more privileged positions under the old communist regime and that what was happening today was a simple correction of this problem. The group differed on the solution to these problems. Many claimed that the internal borders of Yugoslavia are administrative only; they can and should be changed to allow the Serbs of Krajina to separate from Croatia. Others accepted the sovereignty of Croatia but said that the republic had to give better legal guarantees, including in its constitution, of the rights of the Serbian community.

There were also some complaints about the openness of the media in Croatia, with some journalists noting major shifts in senior positions according to affiliation with the party in power, the Croatian Democratic Union. There was also some criticism of the Croatian purchase of arms from Hungary, not because it was illegal or wrong but because there was no requirement to make such transactions public.

Croatian officials stressed that the republic had advanced quickly and significantly on its democratic path. They denied charges that Serbs were being fired from their jobs merely because they were Serbs. They claimed that Serbs had dominated many professions in Croatia under the communists, including the police and some governmental offices, and that this was evident as the old-guard communists -- ethnic Croat and Serb alike -- were being removed from their positions. Moreover, they alleged that the unrest among the Serbs in Croatia and their proclamations of autonomy and separation from the republic were largely instigated by the Serbian authorities in Belgrade.

In Bosnia-Hercegovina, there were two human rights concerns. One was the issue of future conflict among the major national groups that share the republic, especially the Muslims and the Serbs. Prior to the elections, there were outbreaks of unrest in various regions of the republic, but, with the nationality-based parties sharing power, ethnic strife was reported to have subsided. The other, more visible issue was freedom of the press in Bosnia-Hercegovina, since the Commission arrived just as the republic assembly approved a decision which would allow it to appoint managers and editors of Sarajevo television and radio, as well as the main daily *Oslobodjene*. This decision drew sharp

protest and prompted a large rally for press freedom during the course of the Commission's visit. When asked about making senior media officials subject to the assembly's approval, republic officials responded that this was because communist-appointed officials were still in place. They argued that these officials needed to be replaced by new people, who would not be chosen on the basis of their support for the ruling coalition. The decision was also described as an intermediate step on the way to privately run media in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

V. CONCLUSIONS

At the end of their visit to Yugoslavia, Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission and head of the delegation, Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM), a member of the Commission, Representatives E. Clay Shaw (R-FL), Bob McEwen (R-OH) and Bob Dornan (R-CA), and Mr. William Fritts, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Commerce and also a member of the Helsinki Commission, issued the following statement:

"The delegation of the Helsinki Commission came to Yugoslavia with a deep concern over recent crises and tensions. We came with an open mind as to the future character of the country and the relations of the republics and provinces of Yugoslavia with each other, a matter which is for the Yugoslav peoples themselves to decide. What is important in our minds is that any changes in these relations be carried out peacefully, in accordance with democratic principles and respect for equal rights towards all.

"During the course of our visit, we travelled to Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia and the republic of Serbia, and then to Zagreb, the capital of the republic of Croatia, and to Sarajevo, the capital of the republic of Bosnia Hercegovina. We met separately with the President and Vice-President of the collective Presidency of Yugoslavia, the President of the Federal Executive Council (Prime Minister), the presidents of each of the three republics and many other high-level government and parliamentary officials. We also met with opposition parties and members of various groups, including various religious denominations and organizations representing the Albanians of Kosovo and the Serbs of Croatia. We are extremely grateful to those who took time from their busy schedules to meet with us, and who extended warm hospitality to us during our visit.

"Yugoslavia today is at a crossroads where it seeks to define its future against the background of political uncertainties and economic crisis. The future of Yugoslavia is for the Yugoslavs to determine. Our main concern is that decisions be made in a peaceful, democratic fashion, regardless of what future political arrangement will emerge. We found, in our meetings, general agreement among Yugoslavs on this critical point, regardless of their nationality, religion or political persuasion. We were encouraged to hear from many Yugoslavs that the path to a solution of Yugoslavia's ethnic problems lies in the greater democratization of the country. We fully agree with these observations and believe that this path must be pursued urgently and universally throughout Yugoslavia.

"We encourage the Yugoslavs to solve the economic problems which have exacerbated political tensions. We see the continued efforts by the federal government of Prime Minister Markovic to bring about economic reforms as key in this regard. Free market economic principles and private enterprise must be driving forces of the Yugoslav economy if it is to improve, painful as the reforms may sometimes be. The Prime Minister also indicated the urgent need for Western assistance in achieving economic recovery and helping the reform process.

"Particularly in the area of democracy, the delegation noted positive developments since the last Helsinki Commission visit almost one year ago. For one thing, each of the six Yugoslav republics has now held multi-party elections. While they varied in the degree to which they were free and fair, these elections have ushered in a new, long-awaited period of growing political pluralism in Yugoslavia, and a consequent increase in the openness of society and respect for human rights.

"At the same time, we learned that the situation in Yugoslavia had worsened in some respects. The once promising reforms of Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, are threatened by a lack of support from republic governments. The Serbian authorities, after taking a few positive steps last year, have reverted to a policy of political repression in Kosovo and have, in fact, stepped up their crack-down on the Albanian population there, which has led to many human rights abuses, in clear violation of the human rights commitments in the Helsinki Final Act.

"Although personnel changes may bring welcome changes, freedom of expression, including press freedoms, remain unduly restricted in Serbia and, to a lesser extent, complete freedom of expression has still not been attained in some other republics as well. The Serbian community in Croatia maintains that its rights are not protected fully in the new republic constitution and that there has been a pattern of discrimination in employment in the public sector and other areas.

"Our main concern during the visit, however, was the current crisis of Yugoslavia itself, which has created, in the past few weeks, a period of turmoil unsurpassed in the country's post-World War II history. This turmoil, and continued differences among the republics on the future character of the country and their mutual relations, have raised fears of either armed ethnic conflict or a military effort to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia by force. We would strongly oppose such efforts, which would be neither just nor lasting, and would almost certainly lead Yugoslavia into civil war. Clearly, the use of force will not solve Yugoslavia's problems and would complicate the traditionally good relations Yugoslavia has had with the United States of America and possibly with its neighbors and most of the free world as well.

"Fortunately, we saw in our meetings a new desire to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Yugoslavia. Republic and federal leaders have exercised restraint at the very moment when open conflict seemed almost inevitable, and what we hope will be a constructive dialogue between the republics seems to have begun in earnest during the course of our stay. The republics should remain committed to this dialogue to find a common agreement instead of undertaking unilateral action.

"Yugoslavia, as a signatory to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Paris Charter of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), has pledged to act in conformity with detailed and clearly worded commitments regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, the free flow of information and economic development based on market principles. Acceptance and adherence to these provisions are, in a real sense, prerequisites for the integration of Yugoslavia, including all its parts, into a democratic and prosperous Europe. We remain committed to our efforts to encourage full Yugoslav compliance with CSCE commitments. We hope that these efforts will bring to all of Yugoslavia the democratic, pluralistic conditions and mutual understanding which are key to its peaceful future."

VISIT TO ALBANIA
March 27-28, 1991

I. OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the Commission visit to Albania was to observe the political environment for Albania's first multi-party elections, scheduled for March 31. The Commission requested meetings with government officials preparing for the elections, and with opposition party leaders. While the delegation itself left on March 28, three days before the elections, two Commission staff members and an interpreter remained behind to meet with additional opposition parties and candidates and to observe the voting and counting of ballots on election day.

The Commission had as a second objective in Albania a continuation of the discussion initiated with political leaders during the Commission's visit to Tirana last August, during which Albanian interest in joining the CSCE, and developments within Albania, especially in regard to human rights, were major topics.

II. THE CONTEXT

Albania, situated between Greece and Yugoslavia on the Adriatic coast, is a relatively small country, with a population of just over three million and an area slightly larger than the State of Maryland. Its capital is Tirana. According to Albanian figures, 98 percent of the population is ethnically Albanian, linguistically subdivided into two dialects -- the more populous, northern Ghegs and the more dominant (during most of the communist period), southern Tosks. Although some words have roots from neighboring Slavic, Greek, and Romance languages, the Albanian language, while Indo-European, is not closely related to any other and can be traced back to the ancient Illyrians, who are known to have lived in the Balkans as early as the second millennium B.C. (a fact often used by Albanians in regard to territorial disputes). The remainder of the population consists mostly of a Greek minority, although there are Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and a few other ethnic groups as well. The number of Greeks, the largest group, is unknown but was believed to be between 59,000 (the official figure) and 400,000 in 1990.

Reflecting Ottoman Turk, Greek, and Italian influences, Albania can also be divided by religious belief, with around 70 percent being Muslim, 20 percent Orthodox, and 10 percent Roman Catholic in background. However, religious observance was banned in Albania from 1967, when the Government claimed the country to be the world's first atheist state, until the reforms of 1990.

Albania has a long history of foreign occupation, which its current leaders have used to justify isolationist foreign policies and repression at home. It was the last Balkan state to achieve independence, freeing itself from centuries of rule by the Ottoman Empire in 1912. Being a mountainous, relatively inaccessible region, however, it has retained not only its linguistic uniqueness but the old, clan-oriented customs of the Albanian people as well. Ruled during much of the inter-war period by King Zog, Albania was invaded by Italy in 1939 and ruled by a puppet regime until liberated by the Communists, led by Enver Hoxha and closely aligned with the Yugoslav Partisans under Josip Broz Tito.

1945-1989

Hoxha ruled Albania until his death in 1985. A devout and ruthless Stalinist, he sided with the Soviet Union when Tito broke from the communist bloc in 1948, only to break from the Soviets himself in the early 1960's, following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign and rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Albania then enhanced relations with the People's Republic of China until that country initiated post-Mao reforms and expanded ties with the United States in the late 1970's. Since that time, Albania has been largely isolated, although since Hoxha's death the country's new President, Ramiz Alia, has sought to improve Albania's international standing by establishing relations with a greater number of other countries and participating in joint meetings of the Balkan countries. Relations with neighboring Yugoslavia, however, have remained tense due to the situation in Kosovo, a province of the Republic of Serbia where ethnic Albanians constitute the overwhelming majority of the population.

Domestically, Albania became, and still is, the poorest country in Europe, despite considerable mineral resources. Under communist rule, Albania was also the scene of probably the worst human rights abuses in Europe to continue throughout the post-World War II period. The Albanian Government strictly controlled the movement of Albanian citizens, both abroad and internally. For decades, those caught trying to cross the border were given harsh prison sentences if they were not shot and killed while trying to escape. The secret police (*Sigurimi*) remains a powerful and pervasive organization to this day, and an extensive system of prisons and labor camps was created for those who expressed even mildly dissenting views.

The actual number of political prisoners prior to 1990 is unknown; the Albanian Government acknowledged the existence of political prisoners for the first time in 1990, giving a figure of 83, in contrast to the 900-1,000 estimated by recent refugees or the 20,000-40,000 claimed by some foreign sources. Religion was prohibited by law in 1967. While the recognized Greek and Macedonian minorities have had some educational opportunities in their native language, there have been attempts to suppress their cohesiveness and cultural identity.

1990-1991

In 1990, several developments forced Albania to move away from its policies of isolation and repression. From the top of the power structure, President Alia was leading a reform faction in the communist leadership that has gradually gained strength vis-a-vis such remaining hard-liners as former Politburo member and Party Secretary Simon Stefani and Hoxha's widow, Nexhmije Hoxha, who headed the party affiliated organization, the Democratic Front. Moreover, the country's economy, already in bad condition, began a steep and evident decline at about this time.

Among the general population, Albanians who do have televisions and radios were able to receive local Greek, Yugoslav, and Italian broadcasts, in addition to those of Voice of America, the BBC and other worldwide stations. As a result, Albanians were well aware of the wave of political liberalization that swept through Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990. The violent end of the Ceausescu regime in Romania in December 1989 had a particularly strong impact on Albania. Subsequent pressure for Albania to change was strengthened as well by the country's young population; a result of a high birth rate, the age of the average Albanian citizen is only 26 years, the lowest in Europe. Combined with poor economic conditions, this population was growing increasingly restless in its state of isolation.

On foreign policy matters, Albania originally viewed the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a Soviet-American conspiracy to divide Europe permanently, and therefore declined to participate during the formative stages of conference in the mid-1970's. In 1990, however, the Albanian Government changed its position, requesting and obtaining observer status at the Copenhagen Human Dimension Meeting in June of that year. Albania has enjoyed the same status at all subsequent CSCE meetings since then and would now like to become a full member. The prime motivation for joining the CSCE is to gain acceptance in an increasingly integrated Europe and to obtain all the economic benefits which that would eventually entail.

In addition, Albania sought to establish relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union, maintaining officially that the ending of the Cold War had brought an end as well to a need for vigilance against becoming a pawn of the superpowers. Relations with the Soviets, broken during the Sino-Soviet split in 1961, were restored in August 1990, while relations with the United States, broken in 1939 as Italy took effective control of the country, were only restored in March 1991 (attempts to reestablish relations immediately after World War II were unsuccessful). In August 1990, the Albanian Government received a congressional delegation from the U.S. Helsinki Commission. In addition, while President Alia's visit to the United States in September 1990 was for the purpose of attending the United Nations General Assembly rather than holding bilateral talks, his visit signalled a strong desire to improve U.S.-Albanian ties, including with the Albanian-American community.

On the domestic front there were important signs of change as well. In January 1990 and on many occasions since, there were reports of large demonstrations for reform in several Albanian cities and towns, which, in some cases, the Albanian authorities are believed to have brutally repressed and subsequently denied ever taking place. Several reforms were announced, however, which included the abolition of criminal penalties for religious propaganda, liberalization of passport issuance, establishment of a ministry of justice, and permission for individuals to sell produce privately and to form small family businesses. Critical to the subsequent opening of Albanian society, direct-dial telephone lines were established with over 50 countries in March 1990, permitting an unprecedented degree of contact and communication with the outside world.

In early July, apparently responding to the lack of implementation of the announced reforms, more than 5,000 Albanian citizens stormed the West German and other Embassies in Tirana seeking to leave the country. A number were known to have been shot by Albanian authorities while running toward the embassies, and the diplomatic district of the city was closed off. As world attention focused on the country and the situation in the embassies became increasingly difficult, however, the Albanians eventually made the decision to permit those in the embassies to leave for Italy, Czechoslovakia, France and elsewhere. Many sought to come to the United States, and some announced a hunger strike near the U.S. Embassy in Paris to protest delays in processing. The whole incident seemed to have strengthened the reform faction within the Albanian leadership, with several hard-liners being replaced by moderates.

Steps to bring Albania out of its relative isolation in world affairs and, concurrently, to loosen the tight grip of the state on Albanian society were welcomed at home and abroad. Months later, however, these initial steps had not kept pace with rising popular expectations and frustration over a rapidly deteriorating economy. Subsequent public demands for additional and more serious moves toward democracy were paralleled by statements from other countries that only such moves would enable Albania to gain its desired international standing, including membership in the CSCE process. Facing what appeared to be a growing political and economic crisis, the Government of Albania accelerated a process of reform in late 1990 and early 1991.

The first major response of the Albanian Government to the increased pressure for change came in October, when a draft election law was announced that would be adopted the following month. The law would, for the first time since World War II, permit multiple candidates, all of whom still had to be endorsed by the Labor (Communist) Party or its front organizations, to contest each of the Albanian parliament's 250 seats, as well as establish voting procedures that would respect the secrecy of the ballot. In addition, Albania played host to a meeting of foreign ministers from Balkan countries on October 24-25, during which scores of foreign journalists covering the event were permitted to enter the country for the first time.

These measures, unprecedented by Albanian standards, nevertheless represented a continuation of the moderate, cautious approach to political liberalization by which President Ramiz Alia and the communist leadership hoped to retain their power. The new election law, for example, allowed for increased pluralism in the People's Assembly but not for alternative political parties. And during the course of the Balkan ministerial Albania's secret police, the *Sigurimi*, as well as military forces were reportedly deployed in significantly greater numbers than usual.

The continuing limits to reform efforts were highlighted by criticism of Albania's human rights record by Yugoslavia and Greece at the Balkan foreign ministers meeting, as well as by the defection, announced in Paris on the second day of the ministerial, of Albania's most well-known writer and most visible proponent of reform, Ismail Kadare. In a letter to President Alia explaining his decision to defect, Kadare said that he had earlier "expressed very clearly the demand for urgent, deep and complete democratization of the country. However, the promises given were not kept and I along with many Albanians remained disillusioned and bitter."

Kadare's defection was seen as a major blow to Alia, especially since it occurred as the Albanian Government was attempting to convince the 34 CSCE participating States to grant Albania full membership in the process for the November CSCE summit meeting in Paris. Albania had been given observer status at each of the CSCE meetings held since June 1990, but the Government's handling of the July storming of the foreign embassy compounds in Tirana by thousands of Albanians wanting to leave the country, along with its poor human rights record generally, created a feeling that full CSCE membership was premature. This was also the position taken by then Helsinki Commission Chairman DeConcini, U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), and U.S. Representative Jim Moody (D-WI), who concluded after visiting Albania in August 1990 that "as a full CSCE member, Albania would be glaringly out of step with the rapidly developing process of democratization, political pluralism, the rule of law and free market economies that is taking place throughout Europe."

More visible pressures for further change came to the fore soon thereafter. In early December, students at the Enver Hoxha University of Tirana, objecting to power failures that left dormitories without heat or light, boycotted classes and demanded that President Alia meet with them to hear their complaints firsthand. Their protest turned into a three-day demonstration, at which thousands of people called for democracy and shouted anti-communist slogans. The demonstration was reported to have been dispersed violently by special security police. Rioting subsequently erupted in several cities, with destructive rampages prompting the deployment of combat troops and the arrest of scores of individuals who were subsequently charged with vandalism.

Alia did meet with the university students, however, and an emergency plenum of the Central Committee of the Labor Party was quickly convened. At the meeting, five full members and two candidate members of the Politburo, most of whom were considered hard-liners, were dismissed. The Central Committee in effect announced the end of the one-party state in Albania when it decided on December 11 "that the creation of independent political organizations, in accordance with the laws in force, is to the good of the further democratization of the life of the country and pluralism." Several intellectuals, including cardiologist Sali Berisha and economics professor Gramoz Pashko, moved quickly to take advantage of the new situation, forming the first opposition political party -- the Democratic Party -- the day after the decision was made.

This dramatic change in the party position came as a surprise, since Alia and other officials had, up to that time, held firm on tolerating only multiple candidates, not multiple parties, in the elections on February 10, 1991. Subsequent weeks saw attention focus on bringing announced policy changes into practice. The Democratic Party, viewing February elections as too soon for the opposition to mount a serious campaign, called for postponing elections until May and for revising the election law. These requests were at first rejected by the People's Assembly. The Democratic Party, after holding several mass rallies and establishing its own newspaper, responded by threatening to boycott the February elections. The Government then sought to pacify the opposition by releasing hundreds of political prisoners. After a miners' strike supported the demand for postponement, however, the Government rescheduled the elections for March 31.

Meanwhile, other parties, including an Ecological, an Agrarian, a Greek minority and a Republican Party, began to form. The official trade union declared its independence from the Labor Party and said that it would fight to improve working conditions. Statues of Stalin were removed from downtown Tirana and throughout Albania. Nexhmije Hoxha was replaced as head of the Democratic Front, an organization which serves as a transmission belt for the Labor Party in directing Albanian society. Religious services, including a Christmas Mass attended by several hundred people, were being held for the first time in decades. The first independent human rights group, the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was organized.

On December 26, the Labor Party held a national Party Conference which went into closed session to debate how far-reaching the reforms could go. Finally, on December 31, Albanian newspapers published a new, draft constitution for the country which differs with the current constitution in that the Labor Party is not named and a separation between the state and "political organizations" is created. Various human rights were also enshrined in the draft as well as guarantees for foreign investment, although "the principles of socialism" would continue to guide education.

The new year saw pressure for reform continue, however, including a second and third refugee crisis for Albania. With border guards no longer shooting those crossing the frontier, more than 6,000 Albanian citizens reportedly streamed over snowy mountain passes and into neighboring Greece during the closing days of 1990 and the first days of 1991. While most were believed to be members of Albania's Greek minority, some were known to be of the Catholic and Muslim faith, and 37 members of the small Jewish community were permitted to fly to Rome en route to Israel. The large number of refugees pouring into Greece caused considerable concern to the Greek Government, which called upon Albanians to remain in Albania. It asked for and received assurances from the Albanian Government that individuals who return to Albania would not be punished. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agreed to assess the situation, and the European Community agreed to grant aid for the refugees. In addition, Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis held talks with Albanian officials in Tirana on January 13-14.

In March, with widespread rumors circulating that visas to Italy were available upon request, Albanian citizens travelled to Durres and other coastal cities seeking passage across the Adriatic. Rioting ensued when the rumors were found to be false, and close to 20,000 Albanians nevertheless departed on boats they had commandeered. Their destination was usually Brindisi in southern Italy on the opposite shore of the Strait of Otranto. The situation grew so bad that military rule was established in several Albanian ports. Italy, caught by surprise by the mass exodus to its shores, was unable to cope with the situation and finally decided to send some refugees back to Albania. As the situation worsened, Yugoslavia stated its willingness to receive all Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins living in Albania.

Meanwhile, popular protest within Albania continued, including against the founding father of communist Albania, Enver Hoxha. Statues of the former leader were attacked and had to be protected, although the protesters were successfully able to remove the large, golden statue of the former leader from Skenderbeg square in the center of Tirana. Ramiz Alia dismissed the entire government and installed a provisional one, and he agreed to release all remaining political prisoners in light of the protests. It became clear by the harsh reaction to some demonstrations, however, that the President would seek to preserve the legitimacy of the Labor Party that was the basis for his own power.

As election day approached, the situation remained tense. The newly formed opposition parties, however, remained committed to participating in the upcoming elections despite the limited extent to which they believed they would be free and fair. These parties seemed to view change in Albania as a necessarily gradual process, and hoped to encourage the public to remain in Albania and provide the pressure needed to keep up the momentum for the reform process.

III. THE VISIT

The visit to Albania was a short one. Upon its arrival, the delegation immediately met with President Ramiz Alia, who welcomed the Commission's return visit. The delegation then attended a reception hosted by a State Department team which had arrived in Albania just after the restoration of diplomatic relations on March 15.

The next day, the Commission delegation first visited the headquarters of the Democratic Party, where it discussed the election environment with party leaders Sali Berisha and Gramoz Pashko. The delegation then met with Rexhep Mejdani, president of the Central Election Commission, to discuss election procedures and problems. A final meeting was held with Arben Puto, head of the independent Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, during which continuing human rights problems in Albania were discussed. A meeting with the Republican Party was also scheduled, but party officials were unable to make the meeting and therefore had to cancel. Prior to departure, the Commission held a press conference during which the members of the delegation expressed their views on the situation in Albania.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

The first and perhaps most striking change in Albania observed by the delegation upon its arrival was the degree to which Albanian society had become open. During its visit in August 1990, the Commission observed that most Albanian citizens were wary of foreigners, not so much out of distrust as out of a fear of being seen by their own government. Moreover, the free expression of one's political views was still unacceptable at that time. Six months later, the symbols of opposition parties were in evidence, and the people of Tirana were not only willing to talk to foreigners but actually sought them out.

In the meeting with Ramiz Alia, it was clear that the President wanted to be sure that the Commission delegation noticed the changes that had taken place and would give him credit for it. The Commission's meeting with President Alia took place almost immediately after the delegation's arrival. During the course of the meeting, Alia sought three objectives. First, for domestic purposes, he wanted to obtain, or at least to be perceived as having obtained, a Commission endorsement of him personally in light of his efforts which could be used to strengthen his own campaign for an assembly seat in the elections. Second, Alia wanted the Helsinki Commission to support full Albanian membership in the CSCE process, which would greatly enhance Albania's standing in European and world affairs and redound to improve his own stature at home. Third, he wanted to focus attention on the need for economic cooperation between the United States and Albania, which holds one of the few hopes for improving the desperate state of the Albanian economy.

The Commission did acknowledge that the situation in Albania had improved markedly under Alia's leadership in late 1990 and early 1991. Delegation Chairman DeConcini noted as well that bilateral relations were now established between Albania and the United States, something he said he had supported from the beginning. Noting movement toward democracy, DeConcini expressed the hope that this would eventually encompass all human rights, from freedom of expression to freedom to hold private property. He added that if the elections went well and there was a continued increase in the respect shown for human rights and fundamental freedoms, leading to an improvement in the lives of the people, he would then be supportive of Albanian membership in the CSCE. Commissioner Richardson added, in this regard, the importance of the elections being open, free and fair, and of permitting international teams into Albania to observe them.

On trade matters, the delegation stressed the relationship between human rights and economic cooperation, as well as the need for Albania to develop a free market economy. One of the areas for potential cooperation noted was tourism, especially along the Albanian coast. Alia also gave a brief overview of Albanian history, focusing in particular on earlier domination by a variety of foreign powers. He concluded that, while there was now freedom of religion in Albania, Albanians will not let religion divide them. Whether Catholic, Muslim or Orthodox, he said, the most important thing to Albanians is to be Albanian.

Following the meeting with Alia, the official Albanian media reported that delegation Chairman DeConcini had, in fact, given the President full credit as "the initiator" of the changes taking place in Albania and that he supported Alia's continued leadership. In the press conference at the conclusion of the visit, DeConcini was critical of such media manipulation and stated, for the record, that the Commission came to Albania neutral as to the contending parties and seeking only a free and fair election regardless of the winner.

In the meeting with the Democratic Party of Albania, chaired by cardiologist Sali Berisha, the delegation obtained a brief overview of the political environment in the days leading up to the elections. Berisha noted that tensions were high, because the Party of Labor did not want to surrender its power. Nevertheless, he was hopeful that violence could be avoided, claiming that his followers will not clash with the authorities and that the military hopefully will decide no longer to attack the people. He did cite, however, some potential problems with the elections, including a recent report of the loss of 35,000 ballots and the so-called "six percent" rule in the election law allowing a certain number of people to vote in electoral zones other than the one in which they were registered, which, he said, could allow people to vote twice. He also complained of continuing biases in official media coverage of the campaign. Finally, he noted difficulties his party was having in getting permission to hold a rally on March 29. Despite these problems, and with the help of Democratic Party and foreign observers to make manipulation of the results more difficult, Berisha predicted that the Democratic Party would win the elections.

Some of these same problems and issues came up in the ensuing meeting with Rexhep Mejdani, President of the Central Election Commission. Mejdani gave a brief overview of the election process. On March 31, the new assembly's 250 seats will be contested by 1,074 candidates in a majority, as opposed to a proportional, electoral system, meaning that, to win, a candidate must receive more than 50 percent of the total votes cast, which must represent at least 50 percent of the number of registered voters in that particular electoral zone. Where that does not occur, the top two candidates will compete in a runoff election one week later, on April 7, provided that they each have at least 25 percent of the total votes cast. If no two candidates reach the 25 percent mark, then a new list of candidates will be drawn, Mejdani added, for a second round election to be held on April 14. Voters must be 18 years of age on election day, and must present a valid identification card at the polling station at which they are registered. The campaign period will go right up to election day. He concluded by acknowledging that this is all very new for Albania and that it is, indeed, a tense situation.

During the meeting, the Commission delegation highlighted several problem areas, including: only three members of the 16-member Central Election Commission who allegedly were not communists; lack of opposition party access to the official media; manipulation of opposition party newspapers; restrictions on the holding of public rallies; and limits on the number of foreign election observers. Mejdani responded to each of these points, noting in particular that he was a fourth, non-communist member of the Commission and that the number of foreign observers was originally limited to 250 because of hotel space, automobiles and other practical limitations, but that it had nevertheless been increased by 100 people. He noted that any problems observed by the party observers could be raised at higher levels, going as high as the Supreme Court of Albania if necessary.

The final meeting of the visit was with Arben Puto, chairman of the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the first independent human rights monitoring group in Albania. The discussion focused on the general human rights situation in the country. Puto recalled many improvements during the past year but stressed that much more had to be done. He claimed that there were still approximately 300 political prisoners in Albania, some continuing to serve sentences for political crimes that have already been taken off the books. For example, he mentioned Dad Kasneci, a man who was convicted for assisting in tearing down the statue of Stalin in Shkoder in early 1990 and was still serving his sentence despite the fact that the Albanian Government decided itself, later that year, to remove all statues of Stalin from public display throughout the country.

In the press conference concluding the visit, the delegation stressed that it had come to Albania as a neutral observer of the election process and did not support or oppose any particular party or candidate. Senator DeConcini criticized the official Albanian press

for claiming otherwise following his meeting with President Alia. Delegation members also repeated the complaints they had heard about the election process. The delegation mentioned that they had heard of the continued existence of about 300 political prisoners in Albania. The next day, more than 270 prisoners were released, including Dad Kasneci, who had been mentioned in the meeting with the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The press asked questions about the Commission's visit as well as related issues, including the prospects for U.S. foreign economic assistance after the elections.

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